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## **Abstract**

At the beginning of the 2013/14 season in England and Wales, 90 head coaches of the 92 men's national professional football league clubs and 20 of the 22 men's professional rugby union clubs had tenure as a professional elite player in their respective sports. Moreover, Rynne (2014) has claimed that many former elite athletes are 'fast-tracked' through formal accreditation structures into these high-performance coaching roles. The reasons why former elite athletes dominate head coaching roles in professional sports clubs and why a 'fast-track' pathway from elite athlete to high-performance coach is supported remain unclear. Thereby the present study sought to address this issue by investigating the basis for 'fast-tracked' head coaching appointments. Eight male directors of men's professional football and rugby union clubs in England were interviewed to examine how particular coaching skills and sources of knowledge were valorised. Drawing upon Bourdieu's conceptual framework, the results suggested head coaching appointments were often based upon the perceived ability of head coaches gaining player 'respect'. Experiences gained during earlier athletic careers were assumed to provide head coaches with the ability to develop practical sense and an elite sporting habitus commensurate with the requirements of the field of elite sports coaching. This included leadership and practical coaching skills to develop technical and tactical astuteness, from which, 'respect' could be quickly gained and maintained. The development of coaching skills was rarely associated with only formal coaching qualifications. The 'fast-tracking' of former athletes for high-performance coaching roles was promoted by directors to ensure the perpetuation of specific playing and coaching philosophies. Consequently, this may exclude groups from coaching roles in elite men's sport. The paper concludes by outlining how these

findings might imply a disjuncture between the skills promoted during formal coaching qualifications and the expectations club directors have of elite coaches in these sports.

**Keywords:** *coach education; embodied knowledge; Bourdieu; habitus; practical sense; respect; coach recruitment; symbolic violence*

## Introduction

The study of coach developmental pathways has been of interest for researchers seeking to understand how expert coaches develop the skills and knowledge required for coaching in elite settings (Gilbert, Côté & Mallett, 2006; Gilbert, Lichtenwaldt, Gilbert, Zelezny & Côté 2009; Nash & Sproule, 2009). Research has indicated that many high-performance coaches were employed as competitive athletes in their respective sport prior to their appointment (Mielke, 2007). Consequently, the transition from elite athlete to high-performance coach has been regarded as an idiosyncratic career pathway (Werthner & Trudel, 2009). This practice has become so common that attaining the role of head coach<sup>1</sup> has been described by Kelly (2008) as being the “exclusive preserve of former players,” (p. 410) particularly in association football. Supporting this claim is the fact that at the beginning of the 2013/14 season, 90 head coaches of the 92 men’s professional English and Welsh football league teams had previous experience as professional players in association football. This pathway is common beyond association football (Mielke, 2007). A similar trend is reflected in rugby union, whereby at the beginning of the 2013/14 season, 20 head coaches of the 22 men’s professional rugby union teams in England also had previous experience as professional players in their respective sport<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The titles of head coach, manager and director of rugby are interchangeably used across association football and rugby union. Although these roles are not entirely homogenous, for clarity, the term ‘head coach’ has been applied throughout this article with the intention to represent the individual principally responsible for improving the performances and ranking of each club’s first team playing squad.

<sup>2</sup> Biographical material for all head coaches was sourced by accessing individual profiles on each professional rugby union and association football club’s website and cross referencing this with the respective online records of the coaches’ unions.

Moreover, Rynne (2014) has claimed that many former elite athletes are ‘fast-tracked’ into these high-performance coaching roles. Rynne (2014) defined ‘fast-tracking’ as “the special concessions offered to former elite athletes so that their progress through formal accreditation structures is expedited” (p.300). It was with this definition which the present study centred its focus for investigating the basis for ‘fast-tracked’ head coaching appointments of elite athletes transitioning into their first head coaching role from the perspective of elite association football and rugby union club directors.

There are a number of proposed reasons for the production and reproduction of such a career trajectory in elite professional sport. Cushion, Armour and Jones (2003) have outlined how during a competitive athletic tenure, athletes can become accustomed to coaching practices which are “steeped in culture” and that direct participation can provide athletes with an “apprenticeship of observation” (p. 217) which results in athletes internalising coaching practices. Therefore, it has been suggested that playing experience significantly contributes to the informal, field-specific and embodied development of sport-specific coaching content knowledge (Cushion et al., 2003; Jones, Armour & Potrac, 2003; Mallett, Trudel, Lyle & Rynne, 2009; Nelson, Cushion & Potrac, 2006). These embodied and informal learning situations further support the ‘fast-track’ coaching pathway by culminating in athletes developing tacit knowledge of sport and coaching practices (Nash & Collins, 2006; Rynne, 2014). Indeed, Nash and Collins (2006) define how tacit knowledge can be “used to characterise the knowledge gained from everyday experience that has an implicit, unarticulated quality” and accordingly “is often not openly expressed or stated therefore individuals must acquire such knowledge through their own experiences” (p. 470).

Moreover, it has been documented that coaches themselves also valorise embodied practitioner-knowledge and its associated sources of informal learning in comparison to formalised coach education (Cassidy, Potrac & McKenzie, 2006; Cushion et al., 2003; Côté,

2006; Jones et al., 2003; Piggott, 2012). The valorisation of informal and practitioner embodied learning practice over qualifications is despite the promotion of standardised coaching accreditation having been introduced in the United Kingdom (UK) as a vehicle for raising coaching standards (Nelson, Cushion & Potrac, 2013; Taylor & Garrett, 2010). Consequently, reports in the UK media have highlighted how elite athletes within rugby union and association football can sometimes appear to be ‘fast-tracked’ through formal coach accreditation courses (cf. Nixon, 2006; Murtagh, 2006; Walker, 2006)<sup>3</sup>. Frequently, such trends are based upon the assumption that the skills and knowledge acquired as a professional elite athlete, via practically embodied and informal learning contexts, are essential for the successful fulfilment of the elite head coach role (Kelly, 2008). The actual impact that this tacit knowledge has on coaching practice at an elite performance level, however, has not yet been fully conceptualised due to its intangible nature (Cushion et al., 2010). Instead, research on the development of sports coaches has predominantly focused on examining formal learning contexts (i.e. coach education programmes) from the perspective of the coaches themselves (Mallett et al., 2009).

Replacing the view of knowledge being uniformly disseminated in a singular, linear and regulated manner to coaches in a “top-down approach” (Côté, 2006, p. 220), knowledge acquisition has become conceptualised as more nuanced and dynamic (Cushion et al., 2003; Turner, Nelson & Potrac, 2012). Notably, neo-Foucauldian and Bourdieusian studies have shed light on the contested effects culture has on coaches and their coaching practice (Christensen, 2009; Cushion & Jones, 2006, 2014; Light & Evans, 2013; Piggott, 2012; Taylor & Garrett, 2010). Furthermore, several studies (Cushion et al., 2010; Cushion & Jones, 2014; Potrac & Jones, 2009; Potrac, Jones & Armour, 2002) have acknowledged how socially contested processes of coach socialisation contour coach development by significantly influencing which

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<sup>3</sup> The referenced media articles report on the one example of Gareth Southgate’s ‘fast-tracked’ athlete to coach transition in 2006 when appointed as head coach for Middlesbrough Football Club immediately after retiring from an elite competitive playing career.

particular strands of information are initially acquired and then contextualised into coaching knowledge.

These studies however have continued to apply coach-centric views on the acquisition of coaching knowledge. Whilst this is a valuable research angle, the present article suggests that such coach-centric views on the acquisition of coaching knowledge have the tendency to overlook the broader role of the socio-cultural context which frames the coach's learning process. This research lacuna has been recognised by Cushion and colleagues (2010), who identified how knowledge acquisition via embodied practiced-based learning is subject to valorisation by "others" (p. 37) who contest, legitimise or recreate both the learning processes coaches must negotiate and their subsequent selection and employment in the elite sports field. Indeed, examination of the socio-cultural factors which influence the interplay between career trajectory and coach learning can contribute towards understanding why individuals with an elite competitive playing tenure succeed in attaining elite coaching appointments and why the 'fast-track' pathway between elite athlete and high-performance coach persists.

Through their role in identifying and appointing coaching staff, senior directors of professional clubs are key social agents who maintain 'fast-track' pathways between elite athlete and high-performance coach. As Carter (2006) noted in his book on the history of British association football managers and head coaches, club directors contributed to the "continued resistance to the professionalisation" of the coaching role by devaluing formal coach accreditation through the "assumption that playing experience was the main qualification" (p. 107) for a head coach's role. Despite the considerable influence directors have for coach recruitment and development, the criteria by which the appointments of 'fast-tracked' high-performance coaches are based upon remain under-investigated

Consequently, the principal aim of the present study was to examine why senior directors of professional association football and rugby union clubs considered and appointed 'fast-tracked' coaches. To help answer this, a secondary aim was to investigate club directors' perceptions of and the value ascribed to specific forms of high-performance coaching knowledge and abilities during coach selection and recruitment. In doing so, a Bourdieusian framework was utilised in order to critically examine data obtained. Bourdieu's sociological framework is an established tool in the field of coach development and practice (Cushion et al., 2003; Cushion & Jones, 2006, 2014; Light & Evans, 2013) because it helps situate the actions and perceptions of agents within their socio-cultural context. Previous studies have utilised this conceptual framework in relation to coaching to highlight how multiple forms of knowledge influence and are then applied during coach development and practice, such as talent identification (Christensen, 2009; Cushion & Jones, 2006, 2014) and the development of a specific coaching philosophy (Light & Evans, 2013). It is therefore necessary to outline the central elements of Bourdieu's conceptual framework in brief.

## **Theoretical framework**

Wacquant (1993) explains that the "common thread running through Bourdieu's enquiries is to uncover the specific contribution that symbolic forms make to the constitution and perpetuation of structured inequality by masking its economic and political moorings" (p. 1). Effectively, Bourdieu's conceptual framework addresses the dialectical relationship between the actions of social agents and the manner in which social structures contour such actions. For Bourdieu, all agents operate within "bounded social arenas" (Evans, Bright & Brown, 2015, p. 744), or fields, within which agents have a degree of freedom. The pervasive nature of structural factors which agents are exposed to whilst situated within fields can also



shape individual and collective actions and preserve the interests of those residing in positions of cultural and societal power (Swartz, 1998).

Bourdieu (1985) classified the social world as a “multi-dimensional social space” (p.724) constructed of multiple fields that, although relatively ‘autonomous,’ coalesce intermittently with one another through the impermeable and ‘delimited’ nature of their boundaries (Martin, 2003). Hence, agents are situated across multiple fields, each with specific cultural conditions which produce social norms and expectancies, or normalising practices (Bourdieu, 1998; Hunter 2004). Competitive and high-performance sport represents one such field, within which, association football and rugby union, for example, constitute partially autonomous fields within the broader field of professional sport. Each field has its own historical norms, or ‘tastes,’ which include not only the field’s explicit and formal rules and regulations, but also informal, tacit and implicit customs, ceremonies and etiquette that are collectively known as practice (Bourdieu, 1990).

A dynamic power structure exists within fields through which positions of power are contested (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990, 1998). The location of power is dependent upon agents’ objective and subjective knowledge, and ability, to conduct specific forms of practice (Bourdieu, 1998; Brown, 2005). For example, one form of practice by which dominant agents reinforce their position of power is to employ symbolic violence, the strategic legitimisation and utilisation of practices which become accepted as norms in a field, even when such practice is contrary to the interests of a group (Cushion & Jones, 2006).

Agents are distributed within fields based on the overall accumulated volume and weight of capital in which they possess (Bourdieu, 1985, 1986). Yet Bourdieu (1990) distinguishes all agents as having the ability to employ their own strategies for contesting positions of power through embodying various species of capital (cf. Purdy, Jones & Cassidy,



2009). Whilst moving away from Marx's economic reductionism, Bourdieu (1986) conceptualised several more species of capital which agents can accumulate in addition to economic capital. These were social, cultural and symbolic capital. All species of capital can be exhibited in three states: embodied, institutionalised or objectified (Bourdieu, 1986). Social capital is related to the affiliations or obligations of an individual and is represented in an institutionalised state (cf. Kay & Bradbury, 2009). Cultural capital encompasses 'tastes' of consumption (Moore, 2004) and manifests itself in the embodied, institutionalised and objectified states (Bourdieu, 1986). Embodied cultural capital is represented by "long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body," (Bourdieu, 1986, p.47) accumulated both consciously and subconsciously through socialisation to culture and tradition (Brown, 2005; Lake, 2011; Light & Evans, 2013). Institutionalised cultural capital manifests itself in the forms of educational qualifications, whereas objectified cultural capital is presented in the form of cultural goods (Robbins, 1999). Encompassed within cultural capital is physical capital (Shilling, 1993), relating to the health, fitness and aesthetics of the culturally produced and corporeal body of actors (Evans et al., 2015). Finally, symbolic capital consists of "esteem, recognition, belief, credit, confidence of others" (Bourdieu 2000, p. 164) and is the accumulation of agents possessing all other species of capital which can then be converted into symbolic capital for securing agents' positions of social standing within the social space.

Over time, contestation of capital through repeated social practice within fields leads to internalisation of legitimate behaviours and norms which Bourdieu (1990) conceptualised as the habitus, a "system of structured, structuring dispositions which is constituted in practice and is always orientated towards practical functions" (p. 52). This internalisation of norms occurs at the level of the subconscious, or 'second nature,' often in a manner which reinforces the very structures that limit individuals in the first place (Bourdieu, 1990). Over time, the habitus also becomes embodied as deportment, where repeated exposure to the dominant

practices of the field produces and reproduces embodied knowledge and capabilities (Brown, 2005; Cushion & Jones, 2006; Light & Kirk, 2000). This process of the embodiment of the habitus is referred to as *hexis* (Williams, 1995). In addition to this, Bourdieu (1990) signifies the “immediate adherence” to the apparently logical “most precious values” of each field is conceptualised as *doxa*, or the “unthinking nature of practice” (p. 68) that is rarely challenged unless through reflexive action.

Nevertheless, the habitus is not deterministic, as it also encapsulates the creative possibilities of individual actions which enable resistance and transformation of normalising practices. The relationship between agents and structures in Bourdieu’s framework is therefore dialectical as the agency-structure dichotomy intersects at the subconscious level of the habitus (Hunter, 2004). Hence, agents are dialectically influenced by the structural conditions of the field they practice within, whilst at the same time, agents have the opportunity of changing the habitus and *doxa* of the field (Bourdieu, 1984). The extent to which individuals engage in reflexive practices, whether consciously or unconsciously has been conceptualised as the *illusio* (Evans et al., 2015; Hunter 2004).

The application of Bourdieu’s theoretical framework has benefits for studies of coaching because it emphasises the contested nature of structural norms, values and practices within fields by all agents with a vested interest in that field (Cushion & Jones, 2006, 2014; Piggott, 2012). The emphasis on the dialectical interrelationship between individual practices and structural power hierarchies within the field of elite sport coaching is suggestive of a need to investigate how the practices of “other” groups (Cushion et al., 2010, p.37) can contour the practices (and habitus) of individual coaches. These ‘other’ groups include professional bodies with the power to provide coaching accreditation and other employees of professional sports clubs such as players or the senior management board. Amongst these groups, club directors are pivotal, as they possess the ability to valorise specific coaching practices and philosophies

through their recruitment and selection practices (Carter, 2006; Kelly, 2008). In turn, they are able to shed light upon why the ‘fast-tracking’ of former elite athletes into high-performance coaching roles is perpetuated. The literature examining organisational structures of both rugby union (Cruickshank, Collins & Minten, 2013) and association football clubs (Relvas, Littlewood, Nesti, Gilbourne & Richardson, 2010) has already identified club directors to be a powerful group within professional sports clubs who have the authority to dismiss head coaches (Frick, Barros & Prinz, 2010; Koning, 2003). As will be outlined below, club directors can, and do, utilise their position of power to legitimise tastes and practices associated to coaching within their organisations through symbolic violence and reinforcement of the doxic values of the field. This study therefore represents an investigation into the value professional senior club directors attributed to specific forms of high-performance coaching knowledge when addressing why a ‘fast-track’ coaching pathway between elite athlete and high-performance coach was supported.

## **Method**

This study received ethical approval from the Ethics Board of a Higher Education Institution in the UK. A total of eight white British male participants were recruited during the 2012/13 English association football and rugby union seasons via purposive sampling (Gratton & Jones, 2010). Inclusion criteria stipulated that participants had to reside on the club’s board of directors at the time of invitation. Participants also had to be central to the recruitment process of selecting and appointing head coaches for the men’s senior teams. Because the ‘fast-track’ elite athlete to high-performance coach career pathway was being examined, only employees of clubs that were currently competing in the top three divisions in English association football or rugby union were selected, covering the Premier League, Championship

and League One for association football and Premiership, Championship and National League One for rugby union during the 2012/13 season. Only two of the participants had not previously been a coach prior to being appointed as a director. One of these two participants was at the time of interview, however, undertaking his level three coaching qualification. Additionally, five of the eight participants had previously been competitive elite players. Table one outlines aspects of each participant's career profile.

Table 1. Sample characteristics

Pseudonym	Sport	Level club competed at	Ex-player*	Previous coach*
Oliver	Association Football	Premier League		
Eric	Association Football	Championship		Y
Samuel	Association Football	League One		Y
Shaun	Rugby Union	Premiership	Y	Y
Kirk	Rugby Union	Championship	Y	
Keith	Rugby Union	Championship	Y	Y
Tony	Rugby Union	Championship	Y	Y
Ron	Rugby Union	English National League One	Y	Y

\*minimum standard recognised was national club representation

Informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to conducting a semi-structured interview. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim with all club, coach and player names replaced by pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. In total, seven semi-structured individual interviews were conducted face-to-face and one was conducted over the telephone. Due to the extensive work commitments and consequent limited availability of participants, interviews were relatively concise (cf. Richards, 1996), lasting between 24 and 55 minutes (mean = 41.43 minutes,  $\pm$  12.42). Semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to elicit significant depth of understanding of the respondent's subjective perceptions of the coaching role and coach recruitment (Bryman, 2012). Lines of questioning included, but were not limited to: the participant's role at the club and employment history; their current club's coaching staff structure; the recruitment processes employed when appointing head coaches; and how 'fast-tracked' candidates applying or being considered for head coaching positions evidenced the necessary skills and knowledge for successful appointment. Probing beyond the core schedule was completed during interviews to allow participants to elaborate or provide a more detailed explanation of their perceptions and experiences, whilst also affording the researcher more flexibility to identify the central and emergent themes more intuitively (Gratton & Jones, 2010). Initial descriptive coding was followed by selective coding in leading to conceptualising the data via theoretical comparisons (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

## **Results and Discussion**

The results obtained in the present study suggested the directors' judgements for effective coaching centred upon meeting their club's objectives. These were focussed on successful on-field team performance which reflected the 'club's philosophy'. By virtue of being situated in an intermediate position within their respective clubs, the directors'

interpretations of their club objectives and philosophies were developed through a complex interweaving of factors, as the directors were not only accountable to chairpersons but also to additional stakeholders such as spectators and players. Therefore the directors participating in the study acted as ‘cultural intermediaries’ (Bourdieu, 1984) arbitrating between the values and beliefs of the club’s stakeholders. This meant that the directors implicitly regarded themselves as the embodiment of ‘their’ club’s collective values, and thus ‘custodians’ of them, which directed their practice during the selection and recruitment processes of head coaches. Subsequently, although the directors within their responses inferred to *their* interpretation and abstraction of the club’s *collective* values, these are however interpreted and situated as the embodiment of the directors’ *own* arbitrated values for which they subconsciously or consciously practiced. When addressing the study’s aims of examining how senior club directors considered and supported head coaches negotiating a ‘fast-track’ coaching pathway, and the value directors ascribed to specific forms of coaching knowledge, the effect of the directors’ intermediary position is an important point. The discussion returns to this after initially examining what the directors based their recruitment processes on, notably: how in comparison to other coaching candidates, ‘fast-tracked’ head coaches were perceived to be able to quickly legitimise their authority over the players and; the symbolic value the directors attributed to informal sources of coaching knowledge.

*‘Straight away he has to wow everybody’: The symbolic value of player-coach ‘respect’*

When selecting and appointing head coaches, senior club directors were concerned with whether the prospective head coach was capable of achieving successful on-field team performances. As Oliver described, the primary attribute which the directors profiled for achieving this mandate was the necessity for head coaches to establish and then maintain “the

players' respect". The term 'respect' principally related to coaches maintaining a position of authority over playing staff, whilst at the same time fostering positive player-coach relationships in order to get the maximum performance output from the players (Potrac et al., 2002). Kirk and Keith outlined how this guided them as directors when recruiting and appointing any prospective head coach, irrespective of whether they had once been an elite athlete or not:

What do I look for? I think that you've got to ask the players how and what they think of the guys, because ultimately they are the assets which you need to sweat. And if a player or players aren't reactive to the coaches, you can be the best coach in the world, but if you can't resonate with that player then you make a choice, you either get rid of them, the player, or you get rid of the coach. (Kirk)

If the players don't respect you and don't believe in what you are saying then complete waste of time, might as well not be there. (Keith)

For 'fast-tracked' coaches however, the directors judged player to coach respect to be gained through the transferral of capital and status that a candidate brought with them when making the transition from a competitive playing career into a head coaching role. The more successful the playing career, the greater accumulation of capital, and therein, the more elevated the individual's status was because of converting this cultural capital into symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Head coaches embodying symbolic capital were considered to generate increased levels of respect on the basis of player subordination (Cushion & Jones, 2006). Samuel illustrated the manner in which he considered the prestige, and symbolic capital associated with a successful competitive playing tenure, helped his current head coach legitimise his power in fostering the players' respect:

...when you look at the effect (current head coach name) has when he speaks, the respect that you can see in people's faces when he does speak, I think that's the only thing a great footballer can bring over and above you know a manager who wasn't a great footballer. It's just when they [players] just presume that manager was a great player therefore what he is saying must be the gospel. (Samuel)



Demonstrating Bourdieu's (2000) conceptualisation for how "symbolic capital enables forms of domination" (p. 166) of those within the field who perceive it to be embodied by agents, it was upon this basis that a 'fast-track' culture of promoting retiring elite athletes into head coaching positions was built. In short, practices of hexis experienced during a successful playing career were assumed by directors to suggest a coach would embody significant symbolic capital which would be immediately recognised, valued and subordinated to by playing staff. For instance, Tony explained how he perceived a coach's ability to embody symbolic capital influenced recruitment strategies of other clubs who might appoint "a coach who's a 'name,' so it brings with him *that* aura, *that* attitude; players immediately respond".

As Tony inferred, the directors also placed significant emphasis on the immediacy with which head coaches were required to generate player respect. Tony continued to stress that any newly appointed head coach had to "hit the ground running so that people would respond to them". Keith elaborated upon the importance of this further:

...straight away he has to speak, wow everybody, you know to get that respect and think oh right this guy is pretty good he knows what he is talking about. I think if you've been a player, but you've been a good player within that then automatically the boys are going to start listening to you and respect you. (Keith)

The embodiment of symbolic capital was perceived to enable head coaches to legitimise their authority and ensure players would consent to this through enhanced team performance output. Upholding such a view for the immediacy of generating respect was a key reason behind the perpetuation of a 'fast-track' pathway. It was considered that head coach candidates not possessing tenure as an elite athlete would not be capable of achieving instant player respect as required, but instead, would have to negotiate this over an extended period through their coaching practice. With the directors placing priority on head coaches immediately achieving

positive on-field results, the affordance of an extended period in post to achieve player respect through coaching practice was not always guaranteed.

Underpinning the ‘fast-track’ pathway was the assumption of a shared habitus, not only between players and coaches (Cushion & Jones, 2006), but also the directors. As will be expanded upon later, the directors sought candidates who were perceived to share the same coaching values and philosophy as themselves and ‘the clubs,’ and who were judged to best continue practicing these when appointed as head coach. Therefore, ‘fast-tracked’ appointments were all made within clubs by internally promoting senior players into head coaching roles upon their retirement from competitive play. The habitus was deemed to mediate positive player-coach relationships in building and supporting the component of player to coach respect. Any head coach candidate possessing a shared habitus was perceived to possess increased levels of cultural capital from the directors themselves as well as the players.

Yeah definitely being a leader, being well respected by the players, being a good player, so not just fitting into the team but being one of the best players in the team. So automatically you know if he does take over the coaching role most people will be like “yeah ok yeah I can follow this guy yeah I’ve done it on the field so why not off the field”. (Keith)

According to the directors, tenure as a competitive player prior to transition into coaching helped inform head coaches of the skills and knowledge necessary for effective candidacy (Rynne, 2014). The emphasis placed upon athletic experience is suggestive of a doxic value system in which assumptions were made about the link between athletic competence and coaching ability. In doing so however, it can be conversely suggested that the directors valorised alternative forms of knowledge acquisition by consciously acknowledging the strength of cultural capital ‘fast-tracked’ coaches brought to the role. It is on this theme which the discussion now turns.

*'I'd far, far look at character': Hierarchically valuing skills and forms of knowledge*

The sources of knowledge and skills to practice effectively as a head coach, principally the ability to generate player to coach respect, were judged by the directors to be informal and derived from a competitive playing career (Cushion et al., 2003). Competitive playing experiences were considered significant in the development of an appropriate habitus with which to mediate the player-coach relationship. Shaun explained which qualities and skills, in his view, he most valued:

Probably people skills is (*sic*) the biggest and most important. You know if a player has come through as a professional player route you will assume he's got the knowledge for the game and so probably yeah it's their personality and people skills. (Shaun)

Associated to people skills, leadership and man-management qualities were most valued by the directors when recruiting and appointing head coaches. These skills were assumed to be associated with a coach's personality.

I think the one thing that you can't give, you can't teach your head coach, is that ability to manage individually, depending on the type of player that you are dealing with. I think that is a really unique skill. (Samuel)

The directors valorised 'natural' and 'in-built' personal characteristics over formal knowledge. For example, although Eric considered formal knowledge and its sources to be important, he did not perceive such knowledge to contribute to the competencies associated with developing positive player relationships and respect. These competencies were seen to derive from a competitive playing background.

...if you were a coach who had come up as a teacher trained coach, which a lot of our [academy] coaches are teacher trained, you've gone to university, learned about planning and goal setting and differentiation and things like that, then that side comes easy to you, but you won't have the knowledge of having played the games at the highest level and that is of course is quite important... (Eric)

Consequently, all of the participants considered it a requirement that head coaches had competed as a player 'at a level' of competition to help create this implicit understanding of the field's tacit rules associated to effective coaching:

You don't have to have been the best in the world but you have had to have played at a level to understand what's required in rugby union. (Tony)

I do, I think yeah being a player at some level, I just think helps; I think you've had more experiences of different aspects in rugby. (Keith)

Indeed, participants valorised the embodiment of practitioner-knowledge derived from informal sources when practicing in the field of elite sport as a competitive athlete. This embodiment was considered more important than formal coaching qualifications and was significant in supporting the 'fast-track' coaching pathway. Ron expressed such a view when reflecting on a previous coaching appointment he had made which resulted in shaping his view on why he did not significantly value formal coaching qualifications:

They [qualifications] don't really stack up a lot of the time. There are a lot of guys who have got level three or four coaching certificates that can't coach you know. I employed a bloke who's done RFU (Rugby Football Union) coaching assessor, top of the food chain with all of the qualifications, even got a Welsh RFU senior coaches badge and I put him in front of our forwards because I needed a forwards coach and had to give him the bullet after two months... He just couldn't cope with it and the lads saw through him straight away. (Ron)

Irrespective of the accumulation of formalised coaching qualifications and associated knowledge, the inability of Ron's former coach to establish player respect meant that he was judged to be ineffective. This left Ron, as well as the other participants, assigning little cultural capital to formally accrued knowledge. Although the directors acknowledged the legislation requiring head coaches to possess a specific level of coaching accreditation (Taylor & Garrett, 2010), formal knowledge and its sources were not considered vital in terms of the ability for a

coach to work effectively day to day. Instead, the directors considered head coaches having the right ‘character’ to be more important.

...to me there is a difference between RFU level 27 coach or whatever it is and someone who has just raw personality to do the right thing at the right time, to put an arm around someone when it matters, to kick them up the arse when it matters... *I'd far, far look at character...* You are far better recruiting a type of character that is going to be a cultural fit to your club. (Kirk, emphasis added)

Contrasting to Kirk's view, the primacy of natural ability has become somewhat outmoded within the coach education literature (Cushion et al., 2003), since the increasing recognition of coaching being viewed as a social process whereby individuals acquire the skills of effective coaching (Cushion & Jones, 2006). Bourdieu (1977) extends this position by conceptualising agents becoming attuned to cultural expectations of the field in question. Replacing innate or natural character, practical sense is indicative of an agent's habitus at the intersection of the conscious and subconscious decision-making process in negotiating a specific field's cultural expectations (Christensen, 2009). Indeed, immersion in the field through a competitive playing career was deemed by participants to be indicative for the formation of a specific high-performance coaching habitus and deportment (Light & Evans, 2013), imbuing a coach with ‘practical sense’. By acknowledging how coaches subconsciously embodied the field's dispositions for practicing as a coach in an ‘expert’ manner, practical sense builds upon the concept of tacit knowledge which has derived from psychological analysis of coach education and coach expertise (Nash & Collins, 2006). The ability to demonstrate practical sense, which reflected expertise, was assumed to provide significant cultural and symbolic capital to coaches in the field of elite sport. For example, Tony felt that a competitive playing background would inform a head coach's ability to perform and effectively execute their coaching practice as practical sense:

But there's lots of different facets within that [coaching], so scrummage, lineout, back play, defensive play, attacking options, kicking options, so... if you've played rugby

and come through you know all about those things and that's what you've been ingrained to, but that takes a lot of years to learn properly I believe. So the fact that you've been a player and come through that, you then have that knowledge. Then it's about playing that key or that key and when you play it. That's what coaching is about, but you have to understand if you like, what sound those different bits make and I don't think you can have that unless you've played and played at a level. (Tony)

Tony's view suggested a prolonged competitive playing background informed head coaches of their practical sense in a technical and tactical capacity (Christensen, 2009). It is during this time as an athlete whereby the norms of the field, including personal dispositions of man-management, coupled with technical and tactical astuteness, would have been informally internalised as a tacit, subconscious practical sense. Bourdieu (1990) described how the habitus of those associated to a specific field "tends to generate all the 'reasonable,' 'common sense' behaviours which are possible within the limits of these regularities" (p. 53). Such practical sense was not thought to be engendered by formal coaching qualifications.

I suppose like any qualification, it's just a name on a piece of paper, whether you are actually a good coach or not, I don't think it really shows or tells that. (Keith)

Such sentiments follow the general position in the literature on the devaluation of formal coach education (Cassidy et al., 2006; Cushion et al., 2003; Jones et al., 2003; Piggott, 2012). The lack of capital, and thus the low overall value formal sources of knowledge were assigned, suggests that practice within the field of elite association football or rugby union as a competitive player was assumed to constitute as a more operant method for acquiring the most important attributes for successful coaching candidacy. One reason for this was the directors placed additional weight on head coaches acquiring the awareness to embody the individual club's values in their coaching practice. As this was such a significant theme underscoring the directors' views, how this perpetuated the 'fast-tracking' of elite athletes into high-performance coaching roles will now be discussed.

*‘Carrying (our) values through’: Directors as arbiters of taste*

Directors’ perceptions of the ‘identity’ of ‘their’ club impacted significantly upon the process of recruitment and appointment of ‘fast-tracked’ head coaches. This was one other reason why formal knowledge sources were not considered as culturally valuable. Instead, embodied practitioner-knowledge experienced by athletes whilst embedded in club culture through a playing tenure was valued more. Directors felt that candidates who had previously been immersed within the same club environment as a player would be able to immediately create robust and effective relationships with players when appointed as a head coach. Indeed, club directors were eager to promote both non-formal and informal coach learning experiences (Mallett et al., 2009; Nelson et al., 2006) amongst existing playing staff to help support their coaching development. For example, Shaun and Kirk each discussed their club’s strategies for developing their current players’ coaching competencies:

...there are certain individuals that, you know, that because they do coaching with clubs, school, academy lads for us whilst they are still playing, we know whether they are going to come through as good coaches... So we know exactly which players are going to *interact* well with our players later on. (Shaun, emphasis added)

I often look up at senior players who for me extol the values of what it’s like to be (local area name) blah blah blah. I offer them jobs within the community team that if they delivered in there then they can one day move into the [senior] coaching team. (Kirk)

This strategic placement of players in coaching roles was considered a method in which to profile future coaches, as well as a way to enable current players to become accustomed to existing values, practices and beliefs associated with ‘the club’. These values, beliefs and practices related not only to man-management, coaching practice and existing power structures, but also to more ephemeral factors, such as playing style and attitudes. Directors were keen that any prospective head coach should embody and maintain these ‘club values’ through their coaching practice. Shaun considered such reproduction of a club ethos as essential, in order



that a coach would “interact well with our players” whilst also making sure they “fit in with our culture... they’ve got to have that same yeah culture that we have”. Consequently, perpetuating the ‘fast-track’ pathway, former elite players were considered prime coaching candidates with whom to promote coaching knowledge within the club environment and to enlist into the club’s cultural field via both implicit and explicit means.

In defining which values were considered appropriate for a club, the directors also reflected upon their own careers and how these may have related to the recruitment of head coaches. As table one identifies, only Oliver lacked experience as either an elite coach or competitive athlete out of the eight directors interviewed. Six participants had previously been competitive athletes, whereas five possessed a background as a coach, with another director undertaking a level three coaching qualification at the time of interview. Involvement within both of these interdependent roles of player and coach had itself helped determine the construction of the directors’ own habitus as a recognised member of their elite sporting field. Participants outlined how they assumed the ‘philosophy’ of the club should be practiced, not only in terms of administration and ambitions, but principally in terms of how ‘the game’ should be played (i.e. playing style). Moreover, resembling social capital, personal associations with their clubs’ current players contoured directors’ perceptions of recruiting potential coaching candidates. The opportunity to profile their club’s players assisted directors when assessing their potential as coaches. Specific focus centred on a shared habitus, notably how a potential coach embodied and practiced a coaching and playing philosophy, and whether this philosophy matched their own and that of ‘the club’. Profiling was also considered vital in terms of developing networks of trust and familiarity over time between individuals already in the field of elite sport.

A lot of people that I’ve used are actually people I know and trust already... I haven’t gone too far outside of people I don’t know... So I’ve kind of stuck with really people that I know and trust. So either people that I’ve played with, friends with but I know

have a good rugby background, have the same ideas and philosophy as me, how the game is. That's key, if they don't have the same ideas and philosophy there's no point bringing them to the club because we are not going to get on. (Keith)

Therefore, although directors assumed that athletic physical, social and symbolic capital could be converted into coaching cultural and symbolic capital during a coaching tenure, they also had a pre-defined idea about the shared values and beliefs essential to successful coaching practice. This encompassed a specific coaching philosophy and playing style to which coaches should adhere. These practices signify how the reproduction of the prevailing doxic values of the directors, or the “most precious values” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 68) considered logical and legitimate in the field were selectively sought amongst coaching candidates. This resulted in a normalising practice in terms for coach appointments, as Keith's above statement identifies, directors frequently knew prospective candidates personally. Furthermore, directors sought candidates who were perceived to share the same coaching values and philosophy as themselves and ‘the clubs,’ and who were judged to best continue practicing these when appointed as head coach. Tony outlined how this was symptomatic within elite rugby:

If you took that director of rugby, those values are seen in lots of rugby clubs and I think it's a common culture in rugby that you draw through. And you know, if they have been good players for you and they demonstrate the values that you like as a club then people promote them into coaching roles. (Tony)

These practices suggested that directors imposed symbolic violence onto coaches during selection by legitimising their own practice and doxic values as the ‘right way’ for ‘their’ clubs. Moreover, directors often non-reflexively, sought to reinforce their own symbolic capital by ensuring prestigious coaching appointments reflected their own philosophy (Bourdieu, 1990). In doing so, assured the reproduction of the field's dominant values (Cushion & Jones, 2014). In this case, directors emphasised their role as “arbiters of taste” (Christensen, 2009, p.377) for identifying which coaching style and approach were desirable in candidates

for head coaching roles. For example, Tony outlined the rationale for the decision of appointing their current head coach by describing the composition of his club's recruitment panel, noting how he and another ex-player acted as the arbiters of taste during the process and how they wanted the incoming head coach to continue promoting the club's values:

...it might not be sort of articulated and put down but actually the things that we do we ensure that we put the people in who make those decisions *who carry those values through*... There was myself, so ex-player of the club, member of the boardroom for fifteen years, so you know I was head coach when we got promoted, sort of to take those [values] through, so that was one. (Name 2), again, player through and through for thirty years at the club, so *we were the two sort of custodians of the values and the right fit* [for the club] and had the rugby knowledge... (Tony, emphasis added)

The positions of power which Tony and his fellow board members occupied, when acting as 'cultural custodians' for their club during the recruitment process, reflects the ability of board members to define the role of a head coach and even to some extent the coaching practices employed at 'their' club. In this sense, directors were active agents in producing and reproducing the norms of the elite sport field, and the role of a coach, in reproducing the doxic value system contained in their own habitus. The process through which agents legitimise their occupancy of positions of cultural dominance as well as the normalising practice for the field, have also been outlined by Cushion and Jones (2014), who found that coaches imposed symbolic violence onto players who did not embody a habitus that they had defined as legitimate within the field. In the present case, directors appeared to do the same in relation to the recognition and selection of specific traits in coaches. These traits and qualities were subjectively judged by directors, who presented the values they sought in a coach as being in the best interests of 'the club' and to help maintain their club's autonomous cultural and playing identity. This desire to uphold an idealised vision of the playing traditions of 'the club,' but which they had personally defined, illustrates how "power valorises culture and culture performs the service of disguising and legitimating power" (Moore, 2004, p. 448).

In sum, it appeared that the desire for coaches to possess symbolic capital accrued through an athletic tenure was produced and reproduced by the directors' non-reflexive reproduction of their own habitus and doxic values. This illustrates the habitus/field dialectic as depicted through directors' practice of perpetuating the field's implicit normalising practices. The doxic values underpinning the appointment of 'fast-tracked' head coaches with a competitive athletic background was based on a narrowly defined set of norms associated with 'club traditions' and a specific playing style, which were, at least according to participants, defined in part by the directors themselves. Moreover, it reinforces the aforementioned claim of habitus to be "constituted in practice and is always orientated towards practical functions" (Bourdieu, 1990, p.52).

## **Conclusion**

The current study has highlighted how senior directors of elite association and rugby football clubs associated coaching knowledge and ability with specific forms of capital when recruiting and appointing 'fast-tracked' head coaches. At the forefront to their profiling was the ability of any prospective head coach to generate and maintain player 'respect'. The efficacy of achieving this was judged by personal dispositions, habitus and cultural 'fit' within each club. Such observations suggest coach socialisation is central to coach recruitment processes. This socialisation process, however, began during a coaches' previous playing career, because, at least to the participants in the present study, a competitive playing tenure culminated in the majority of agents' initial socialisation into the learning process for coaching. Moreover, directors actively sought coaches who embodied the same or similar coaching philosophies and practices that they themselves valorised, and thus at the same time was a reason why formal coaching qualifications were devalued. Indeed, the assumption that experiences gained during earlier athletic careers were assumed to provide head coaches with

the ability to develop practical sense and an elite sporting habitus commensurate with the requirements of the field of elite sports coaching, goes some way to explaining how the 'fast-tracked' career pathway from elite athlete to high-performance coach is reproduced. This also outlines the disjuncture between the skills promoted during formal coaching qualifications as club directors valorised practically embodied knowledge over knowledge accrued within formal learning environments. In promoting this aspect, the directors were found to strategically negotiate the 'fast-track' coaching pathway by promoting additional practice-based learning experiences. As male competitive athletes are the only population with the means to appropriate and embody the capital and habitus valorised by directors in this study, by default this could result in the imposition of symbolic violence onto other populations for whom competing in male elite sport is inaccessible, most distinctly women. Finally, because directors practiced in the role of cultural intermediaries when arbitrating the maintenance of 'their' club's values and philosophies, any prospective head coach who possessed a shared habitus with the directors themselves was assigned with greater cultural and symbolic capital and thus considered a more favourable candidate. As all of the study participants who occupied the positions of cultural mediators within 'their' clubs were white British males, further examination of this issue could shed light on the lack of representation for black and ethnic minorities in head coaching positions at the elite performance levels of English association football and rugby union.

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